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Notes on Mombasa and East African Protectorate, by the Right Honourable J. Chamberlain.

MOMBASA itself, together with the 10-mile strip of coast, is leased by the Sultan to the British Government for 17,000*l.* per annum. It is entirely administered by the English. The legal status of slavery has not been abolished, and the English Court takes cognizance of slavery. The Sultan would be willing to cede this entirely to the English, in which case it would become a British Colony, and the Consular jurisdiction of other nations would cease. The only difficulty is, that it would be impossible to allow the continuance of slavery in a British Colony, and Sir Arthur Hardinge is alleged to have made promises to the Arabs not to interfere with the existing system. The country beyond the 10-mile strip is beyond the Consular jurisdiction.

The railway runs for 584 miles from Mombasa to Port Florence on Lake Victoria. It ascends from the coast to the highest point, 8,300 feet, on Mau summit, about 490 miles from Mombasa. There are thirty-seven viaducts. Many of them have been obtained from America owing to the inability of English manufacturers to supply in time and at equally low prices. There is also a long bridge immediately after leaving Mombasa which was built by an English firm. The construction has been expensive—amounting in the whole to about 6,000,000*l.* This is largely due to the difficulties of a mountain line, but also largely to the fact that the country was absolutely unknown and unsurveyed; and the engineers have had to seek their way through jungle and scrub where it was impossible to see any distance ahead. They have also been subjected to pressure to hasten the opening of the line for political reasons, and have, therefore, been unable to survey as carefully as they otherwise would have done. If more time had been given it might have been better to divert the line in places from a straight course, so as to take in cultivated country on either side.

The ballasting of the road is not yet completed, and in many cases the embankments have not yet settled down, but the line is in good order. The workshops at Nairobi are admirably designed, and the work does infinite credit to those who have carried it through under exceptional difficulties, being unable to rely either on native labour or any local supply of materials, food, or even water.

We turned back at the 521st mile on the descent from Mau to Port Florence. From the coast the railway proceeds for the first few miles through a rich tropical country, in which cocoanuts and bananas are growing; then for many miles through scrub, interspersed with open plain. At about the 250th mile the line begins to pass through plains in which there are vast herds of antelope, hartebeeste, wildebeeste, zebra, and every kind of gazelle, besides lions, baboons, jackals, hyænas, panthers, and ostriches. The Masai have enormous grazing grounds, where they keep large herds of humped cattle and enormous flocks of sheep. These they regard as property, and are unwilling to part with them. The sheep do not appear to be of the woolly kind.

At Nairobi, 5,000 feet above the sea, are the head-quarters of the railway, and an English Colony of about seventy people, including some English and Scotch settlers, besides a number of Goanese and Indian traders. After Nairobi, the animal country continues over the Kikuyu and Mau escarpments.

From some way beyond Nairobi onwards the climate is most beautiful, resembling the best part of an English summer—not excessive heat in the day, and quite cool at night. At Mau the temperature went down to 42 Fahr. in the evening.

On the Mau escarpment there are vast rolling plains with clumps of trees in the declivities of the hollows of the hills. The whole country bears considerable resemblance to the Sussex Downs, and, in parts, to an English park. Throughout this district English children live and thrive, and the settlers speak with the utmost confidence of their experiments in cultivation.

English roses bloom profusely, and all English fruits and vegetables can be cultivated.

The line from the Mau summit to the Lake passes through an uninteresting country, and the temperature rises again as the line falls.

The population is sparse. The Masai are a wandering, pastoral tribe of warriors. They are averse to all manual labour and to trade, but they have readily accepted the presence of the English, and are on good terms with them. The Kikuyu, another important tribe, are more intelligent, but also more treacherous, and have occasionally given some trouble. Shortly before our visit they cut up a small caravan of Portuguese and native traders, and a punitive expedition was on its way to capture the murderers and to secure redress. The Kikuyu are, however, now taking to work on the railway, where they are chiefly employed as wood-cutters and stone-breakers for ballast.

There are many other divisions of these two principal tribes having similar characteristics. The Masai suffered terribly a few years ago from drought and disease, and are supposed to be dying out.

As regards cultivation, the variety of temperature promises an equal variety of production. Besides the traffic which may be expected from Uganda when that country has been developed, and which will include rubber, ivory, and other tropical products, it seems probable that cotton, rubber, copra, bananas, and other tropical products may be grown on the coast, while maize is already largely cultivated by the natives along the line for more than 200 miles.

The grazing plains would probably afford opportunities for ranchers prepared to expend capital in providing a better kind of cattle and sheep, and it is stated that some colonists from New Zealand have expressed their intention of settling there for the purpose. Another colonist has asked for a Concession for an ostrich farm, and has gone to the Cape to purchase birds to cross with the indigenous stock. Wheat has been tried successfully about Nairobi, and the downs between there and Mau would seem to afford an admirable opportunity for growing corn.

A Syndicate represented by Mr. Gedge is seeking for minerals and diamonds, and Mr. Gedge declares himself to be well satisfied with the prospect.

The country is on the whole dependent for water on the rains, the rivers generally being small and dried up in the summer. It may, therefore, be subject to drought, but in places there are opportunities for irrigation works, and also a chance that artesian wells might supply perennial water.

Mr. Gedge's Syndicate has asked for a large grant on the coast, of a monopoly in the collection of rubber, and also for a monopoly for growing opium. The latter ought, I think, to be refused, as there are obvious objections to introducing opium among the natives. The former application should be favourably considered, although the grant asked for, 200 miles by 30 miles, is enormous. The country is so large that there will be ample left for other Syndicates, and if cultivation is to be hastened, it is most desirable to offer favourable terms in the first instance such as will tempt the introduction of large capital. A single successful experiment would speedily bring a host of other applicants.

At present the officials under Foreign Office regulations are not allowed to take land for agricultural purposes. I think that this is a mistake under the circumstances, and that land either as a free grant, or on very easy terms, should be given to every official who applies for it on condition that its cultivation does not interfere with his official duties. The primary object of the Administration should be to introduce new cultivation and settlers, and the experience gained by the working of plots of land by officials along the line would be most valuable, and would enable immigration to be carried out with some certainty as to the results.

In the warmer climate, where European children could not thrive, there is ample room for Asiatic immigration, which I think should be encouraged, and an effort made to grow cotton, rice, fibre, coffee, and similar products.

The higher lands will, I believe, constitute a white man's country, and English and Scotch farmers would find profitable occupation if they came out with a little capital. Before, however, the Government could fairly invite such immigration, careful and fuller experiments ought to be made in regard to the fertility of different soils and the effect of the climate. With this object, I have suggested the immediate formation of a Scientific Agricultural Department, similar to that which has been established in the West Indies under Dr. Morris. The Head of this Department, who might be recommended by Kew, should have a salary of not less than 1,000*l.* per annum. He should have not less than four assistants, and they should prospect the country and establish model plantations in different parts.

I think that it would be desirable that at every railway and Government station along the line the stationmaster and other officials should be encouraged to grow seeds to be supplied by the Government. The land given them would be of small area and the profit of the Government would be indirect in the shape of information, and not derived from any profit on the land, all of which should go to the persons cultivating it. In this way, the capacities of the country would be tested over a very large area in connection with a great variety of products.

As a further means of hastening the development of the country, the number of Collectors or Sub-Commissioners should be increased. Every encouragement should be given to them to learn Arabic and the native languages, and to get into touch with the native population; although these are at present little removed from savages and go about almost naked, there are plenty of indications that they will soon contract new wants, and may be induced to become customers for British manufactures. With the growth of new wants will also come the readiness to work in order to earn the money for their purchase.

The salaries at present given appear to me too low, especially considering the small chance of promotion. 600*l.* is too little for a Commissioner of a province of enormous area, and there should be a gradual rise to at least 800*l.*, and to probably 1,000*l.* in the more important posts.

The salary of Sir Charles Eliot's post should also be increased to an equality with that of the Governors of West Coast Colonies or of Northern and Southern Nigeria.

On the whole the staff appeared to me to be efficient, and in some cases to be exceptionally good. Mr. Jackson, the Assistant Commissioner, and Captain Bagge, the Commissioner at Nairobi, are both first-rate. The work is very hard, as they have to travel all over the province, through the jungle and forest, and to keep in touch with all the native tribes.

I made careful inquiries as to the possibility of obtaining labour for the Transvaal. The prospect is certainly not hopeful, and emigration ought to be forbidden along the greater part of the line, where the only effect would be to starve the country for the benefit of the Rand. The praiseworthy efforts of Sir George Whitehouse and his assistants to induce the natives to labour would be discouraged, and the first to leave would be the men whom they had trained to work. As they only pay at present 5 rupees per month, the offer of 50*s*. from the Rand would be an irresistible temptation.

It is very doubtful whether the tribes would be suitable for mining work. The Masai would certainly refuse to go, and would die if they did go. The Kikuyu cannot be spared. If, however, it is considered essential to make an experiment, an offer might be made to the Kavirondos, who are more numerous, and to the Waganda in the Uganda Protectorate, who are more civilized than the natives of the East African Protectorate.

The Nandes and Lumwas might be tried, but as they have no great Chiefs, it would be a matter of almost individual negotiation, and probably would not justify the expense. In any case, the experiment should be, in the first instance, on a small scale. The men should understand exactly what is expected from them. They should go in charge of one of their own Chiefs, and be well looked after and well treated on the Rand. If this were done, and they were returned after a year or two well satisfied with their conditions, they might act as missionaries for further emigration, and a constant stream of labour might in this way be created. On the whole, however, I think it is rather premature to make an attempt, and it would be better to leave it altogether for the present.

It was represented to me from several quarters, and is, I believe, the general opinion of the Administration and of the settlers, that the ultimate control of the railway should be handed over to the Government, and not treated as a separate Department. The accounts would, of course, have to be kept distinct, and the expenditure on the railway would remain as a debit against the Protectorate, the interest on which would be repaid as soon as the working became profitable. At present, and without great exertions to develop the country rapidly, the railway is not likely to pay working expenses for a long time to come, but the promise of the future seems to me to be good provided that money is not spared at the outset in the experiments necessary to secure a rapid increase of population and cultivation.

Sir Charles Eliot also suggests the amalgamation of the Uganda and the East African Protectorates. There is a good deal to be said for this view, as Uganda has really been the objective of the railway, and, having a much higher civilization, would be more amenable to the efforts which might be made for a development of trade.

Asiatic immigration might be encouraged by offering land to the coolies now employed on the railway, with opportunities for bringing over their wives and families.

If Dr. Herzl were at all inclined to transfer his efforts to East Africa there would be no difficulty in finding land suitable for Jewish settlers, but I assume that this country is too far removed from Palestine to have any attractions for him.

Ladysmith,
January 2, 1903.

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